



Compliments of:

Joan Buchanan

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15TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT WEB SITE:

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USEFUL RESOURCES:

California Department of Education: www.cde.ca.gov • 916-319-0800

Information and Applications for Cal Grants: www.calgrants.org • 1-888-224-7268

US Department of Education: www.ed.gov

Application for Free Federal Aid: www.fafsa.ed.gov • 1-800-433-3243

Take virtual tours of various colleges: www.ecampustours.com

General Guide to College Planning: www.collegeplanning.org

Register online for the SAT Exam: www.sat.org

Register online for the ACT Assessment: www.actstudent.org

Higher Education Consultants Association: www.heca.online.org

Explore the College Scholarship Service Profile: www.collegeboard.org

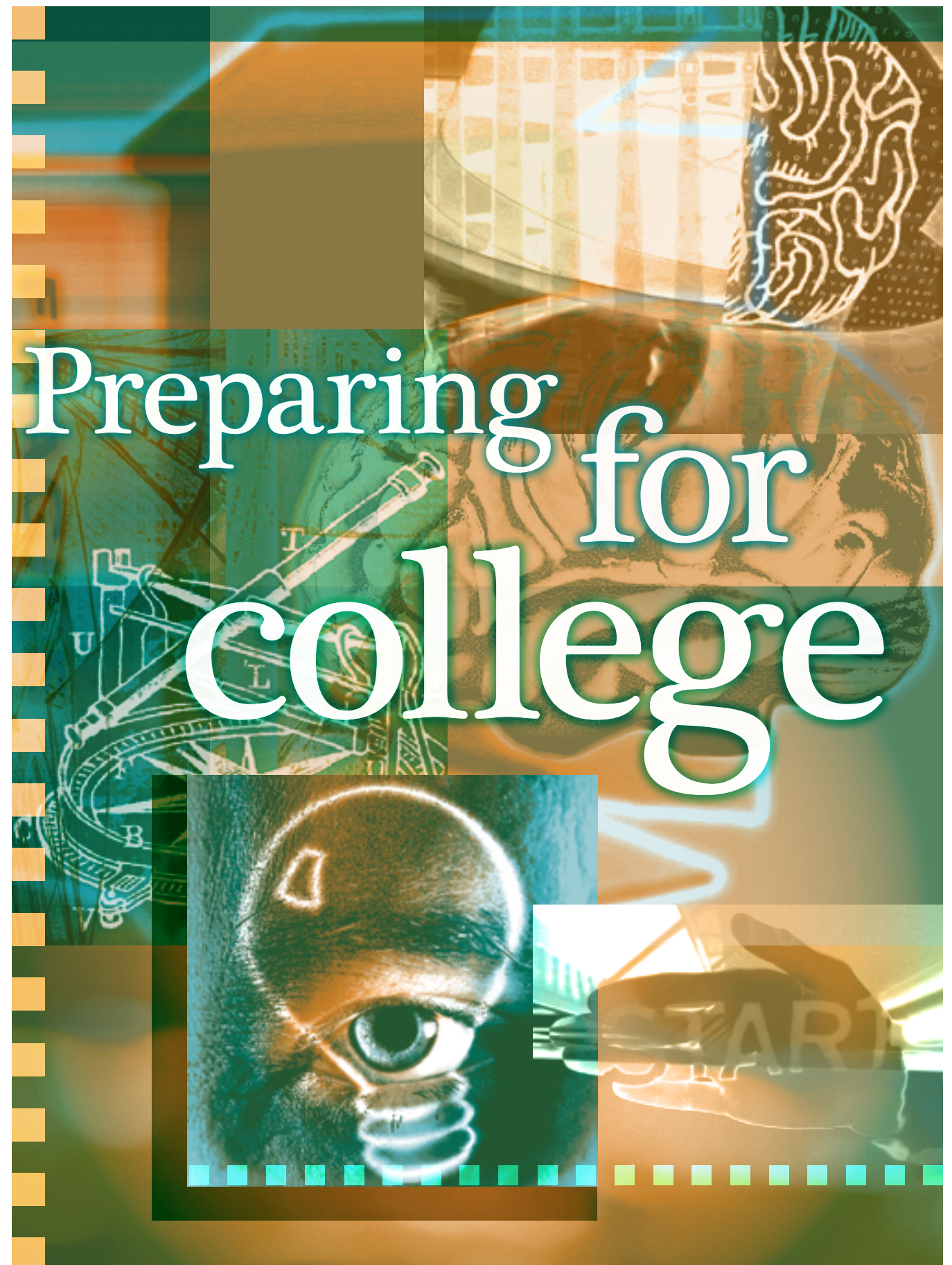
Online database of privately sponsored scholarships: www.fastweb.com

Download applications for CSU Colleges: www.csumentor.edu

Download applications for the UC System: www.ucop.edu

Find money for college: www.scholarships.com

Tips and applications for scholarships: www.collegescholarships.com





Dear Prospective College Student,

Preparing for and applying to college can be a complicated process requiring years of preparation.

In order to guide you through the process, I am offering this pamphlet for your convenience. Included in the booklet are time lines, information on entrance exams, tips on writing your admissions essay, useful techniques in searching for colleges and finding ways to pay for college.

As a former school board member and a representative in the California State Assembly, I hold education as one of my top priorities and support efforts to extend educational opportunities to everyone. Please take advantage of this pamphlet and use it as your signpost to a successful future. If you need further assistance with preparing for and applying to college or financial aid, please don't hesitate to contact my district office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joan Buchanan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joan" being more prominent than the last name "Buchanan".

Joan Buchanan
Assemblymember, 15th District
California State Assembly

Paying for college

Cal Grants, sponsored by the State of California and administered by the California Student Aid Commission, are one of the most effective ways to pay for college in California. It is free money and does not need to be paid back. To qualify, you must be a graduating senior or recent graduate, have at least a 2.0 GPA, meet financial requirements and apply by March 2nd. For workshop dates and locations, an application and general information, visit the Cal Grant website at www.calgrants.org or call 1-888-224-7268.

Private Scholarships are frequently given by various organizations, foundations and clubs. The best way to take advantage of these scholarships is to search online:

www.collegeboard.com/pay/
www.scholarships.com
www.collegescholarships.com

BEWARE OF SCHOLARSHIP SCAMS! You may come across such scams during your search for scholarships. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) cautions students to be alert for these tell-tale lines:

"The scholarship is guaranteed or your money back."

"You can't get this information anywhere else."

"I just need your credit card or bank account number to hold this scholarship."

"We'll do all the work."

"The scholarship will cost some money."

"You've been selected by a 'national foundation' to receive a scholarship."

"You're a finalist" in a contest you never entered.

For more information on scholarship scams, visit the Federal Trade Commission website at www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/edcams/scholarship/ or call 1-877-382-4357.

With a Cal Grant you can get up to \$9,708 a year to pay for college expenses at any qualifying California college, university or career college in California.

In 2006, the Department of Education made or guaranteed more than \$60 billion in low-cost student loans, a \$4 billion increase over 2005 levels.

Campus visits

Once you’ve identified your preferences and created a short list of potential colleges, contact the admissions office of each school and plan to visit these colleges before making your final decision. An in-person campus visit gives you a good idea of what life would be like at that particular school.

Tips for planning a campus visit:

1. Schedule an appointment with admissions, a faculty member (if interested in a particular major), or other individuals based on your interests; like an athletics coach or internship coordinator.
2. The best time of year to visit a college is in the spring of your junior year and the fall of your senior year.
3. Take advantage of campus tours. This is a great chance for you to ask all of your questions and get thorough information about the college.
4. To get the most realistic impression of the college, arrange your visit during a “regular day” at the campus. Avoid visits during finals week, spring break or summer vacation. Tour the campus when classes are in session.
5. Don’t let a rainy day ruin your impression of the school or the students. Keep in mind that bad weather can make everything seem gloomy.
6. Discover the classroom experience. Look in the course catalog to find a class that interests you and attend it. Is this an environment that you could learn in? Is it too big or small?
7. Take the time to explore the city surrounding the campus. Do you care for a big city or a small, college-town setting? Does the area feel safe?
8. Collect and save all brochures, pamphlets, etc that you receive on your tour and update your “College Comparison Worksheet” with your personal impressions of your campus visit.

The average annual cost of a public college education for tuition and fees is now \$11,000.

The average annual cost of a private college education for tuition and fees is \$27,000.



Why consider college?

A college degree means greater opportunity and choices. The knowledge and skills you gain can be used for the rest of your life.

ENHANCED KNOWLEDGE

A college education will increase a person’s ability to understand developments in academia and in society, think abstractly and critically, express thoughts clearly in speech and in writing, and make wise decisions. These skills are useful both on and off the job.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The world is changing rapidly. Many jobs rely on new technology and already require more brain power than muscle power. In a person’s working life, more and more jobs will require education beyond high school. A college education will increase the number and variety of jobs from which a person can choose.

HIGHER INCOME

A college degree increases the likelihood of a higher income, a better standard of living and a more satisfying job.

BROADEN YOUR PERSPECTIVE

A college education can help increase a person’s understanding of their community, the nation and the world as he or she explores interests, discovers new areas of knowledge, considers lifelong goals and becomes a responsible citizen. College education also provides a greater understanding and appreciation of different ideas, philosophies, cultures and people.

Education Pays!
Males between 24 and 34 years old can earn 54% more with a college degree than if they only had a high school diploma. Females in this same age group can earn 88% more.





Preparing for college: The early years

The work you do in high school really counts! It is no surprise that your grades and classes will have a great influence on where you will go to college, but it will also determine how well you perform once you get there. Participating in extracurricular activities, developing your study skills and taking challenging courses are all important factors that give you a good start.

GOOD GRADES

Your Grade Point Average (GPA) is one of the greatest factors that college admissions takes into consideration because it is the most important clue as to how serious you are as a student. Good grades take hard work and well developed study skills.

CHALLENGING CLASSES

Grades matter, but getting an “easy A” doesn’t always pay off. It is equally important to challenge yourself with tougher courses. Taking honors or Advanced Placement (AP) classes gives your college application a greater consideration because it demonstrates your desire to learn. Additionally, these types of classes may earn you college credits, a terrific way to stay ahead of the crowd!

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Participating in activities outside the classroom, such as athletics, band, choir, drama and clubs, are nearly essential to becoming a desirable applicant for college. From these activities you are able to develop your discipline, teamwork and leadership skills. Additionally, it is important to volunteer or work part-time.

VARIETY OF COURSES

Take some elective courses to explore other interests and become a well-rounded student in the process. Not only do a variety of courses look good on your college application, but it may also help you discover potential career paths.

Your JUNIOR YEAR calendar...

AUGUST

- ☐ Collect dates and locations for college fairs in your community.
- ☐ Review your college savings plan and be sure you are on track. If you don’t currently have a plan, start saving now.

SEPTEMBER

- ☐ Study and register for the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT).
- ☐ Start your college search by determining what factors/criteria matter to you, (i.e.: location, costs, programs, etc.). (See inserted worksheet)
- ☐ Talk to your parents and school counselor about attending college.

Retake your admissions exam: Studies have shown that students can generally increase their score by taking the entrance exam a second time. However, you must begin taking these tests during your junior year so that you will have time to retake them, if necessary.

Choosing the right college

WHERE TO START

Choosing where to go to college is a big decision, so it is important that you take the time to consider your preferences and options. A great place to start is to have conversations with your parents, family and friends. Keep in mind that the preferences of your family and friends may not be the same as your own, but these discussions can get you thinking about what considerations are most important to you.

WHAT’S IMPORTANT TO YOU?

There are endless factors to take into account when choosing a college, but here are a few you may want to consider. There’s no simple rule to rank the importance of such considerations, so take the time to decide what matters most to you.

- **Type of University: public vs. private; two year vs. four year**
- **Location of School**
- **Admissions Criteria**
- **Academic Programs**
- **Student Activities**
- **Campus Safety**
- **Cost/Financial Aid Availability**
- **Athletics**
- **Housing Options**
- **Size of Student Body**

Start with these suggestions and compose your own additions to this list.

A LIST OF POTENTIAL COLLEGES

To deepen your search, meet with your High School Counselor to get information on college catalogues, guidebooks and college fairs. Another popular source for information on colleges is on the web. Try using a search engine, like the California College Guide at www.cpec.ca.gov/collegeguide/ or take virtual tours of various campuses at www.ecampustours.com.

Based on the information you are able to gather and your preferences, make a list of potential colleges. Your list should include 10-15 options during your junior year, but should be narrowed down to 3-5 in the Fall semester of your senior year.

The happier you are at the college you choose, the more likely you are to succeed in graduating with a degree.





Tips for your admissions essay

Along with your academic record and test scores, the admissions essay serves as another important aspect of your college application. It allows the admissions officer to see the personal side of you and how much you can contribute to the college or university.

Suggestions for a more successful admissions essay:

- Answer the question. This might seem obvious and simple, but it is one of the most overlooked aspects of admissions essays.
- Write naturally, but concisely.
- Use proper grammar and punctuation.
- Personalize your essay. Allow your personality to shine through.
- Provide details to keep the story colorful. Use your everyday vocabulary.
- Write about your own unique, funny, interesting experiences.
- Be honest.
- Tell a story in a relaxed, conversational style.
- Use humor.
- Convey a positive message (avoid cynicism).
- Write about topics you are passionate about.
- Use analogies to convey your message.
- Use logical paragraph breaks.
- Use the active voice.
- Use a large font that is easy to read.
- Proofread several times and get feedback from valued sources.

Avoid the following:

- Overselling yourself or trying too hard.
- Rehashing facts that can be found elsewhere in the application package.
- Writing a scholarly or overly academic paper.
- Appearing overly idealistic or preachy. Avoid essays on “world peace.”
- Trying to explain blemishes on your record.
- Discussing dysfunctional family issues.
- Using trite, tired themes for the focus of the essay. Be original.
- Using large, pretentious words. Put away the thesaurus.
- Overusing adjectives.
- Being boring and monotonous.
- Being gimmicky.

Legitimate companies never guarantee or promise scholarships or grants.

Students are currently receiving over \$122 billion in aid each year.

OCTOBER

- ☐ Take the PSAT.
- ☐ Attend a college fair and talk with college representatives that visit your school.
- ☐ Do an online college search. (See page 6)
- ☐ Meet with your high school counselor about ways to better prepare for college.

NOVEMBER

- ☐ Request and review brochures and catalogs from colleges that interest you.
- ☐ Create a list of 10 to 15 colleges that fit your requirements.
- ☐ Track important deadlines for each college on your list.

DECEMBER

- ☐ Begin planning for the SAT and/or ACT exams. Know the registration process and test dates.
- ☐ Attend area financial aid meetings or meet with your school counselor about financial aid.
- ☐ Start a file of scholarship/financial aid data, (i.e.: criteria, amounts, contacts, deadlines, etc).
- ☐ Purchase an SAT and/or ACT study guide and familiarize yourself with the exam format.

JANUARY

- ☐ Schedule visits to 3-5 colleges on your list. (See page 7)
- ☐ Organize scholarship and grant data. Maintain a calendar to avoid missing deadlines.

FEBRUARY

- ☐ Review the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- ☐ When scheduling senior classes, include credits to meet college entrance requirements.
- ☐ Registration is due for the April ACT.

MARCH

- ☐ Arrange more campus tours. During college visits, be sure to ask about financial aid options.
- ☐ If taking AP courses, talk to your counselor about CLEP exams.
- ☐ Make a list of teachers, employers or coaches that may write you letters of recommendation.
- ☐ Register for the SAT, if taking the exam in April or May.

APRIL

- ☐ After visiting all of the colleges on your list, compare and rank them in terms of preference.
- ☐ Register for the SAT, if taking the exam in June.

MAY

- ☐ Take AP exams.
- ☐ Consider taking a summer course at a local college.
- ☐ Work a summer job related to your career interest or participate in some community service.
- ☐ Register for the ACT, if taking the exam in June.

JUNE

- ☐ If considering private scholarships, begin to complete forms. Be aware of scholarship scams.

JULY

- ☐ Begin working on college applications and essays.
- ☐ **Enjoy the rest of summer and get ready for your senior year!**

Your SENIOR YEAR calendar...

AUGUST

- Begin to collect and file info from each college on your list, (i.e.: cost, admissions requirements, scholarships, financial aid, deadlines, etc).

SEPTEMBER

- Register to take the SAT and/or ACT exams if you have not already taken them at least once.
- Ask for letters of recommendation from teachers, administrators, coaches, employers, etc.
- Meet with counselor about preparing for college and make sure you are on the right track.

OCTOBER

- Take the SAT and/or ACT again OR for the first time.
- Write admissions essays, if needed.
- Continue to visit various campuses.

NOVEMBER

- Submit your college admission applications. Pay attention to deadlines.
- Request financial aid applications from your colleges.

DECEMBER

- Fill out your FAFSA application, so it is ready to be sent in on the first of January.
- Finalize other scholarships/grants.

JANUARY

- Turn in FAFSA application as soon as possible. Even though the deadline is not until March second, turning in your application early guarantees proper processing.
- Request that your high school send your transcripts to the colleges you are applying to.

FEBRUARY

- Confirm that your transcripts have been delivered and received.
- Begin planning for a summer job or internship.
- Keep grades up. Second semester grades can still affect your acceptance and scholarships.

MARCH

- If you have not received your Student Aid Report (SAR) within one month, check its status. Make sure that your SAR is received at each college you listed on your FAFSA.

APRIL

- Make a final decision about which college to attend. Pay attention to specific deadlines, such as admissions deposit, housing, financial aid, etc.
- Reply to other colleges that you will not be attending.

MAY

- Take AP or CLEP exams, if needed.
- Confirm summer job or internship.
- Send a final transcript to your chosen college.

Congratulations! You're almost there. Be sure to attend summer orientation and keep in mind that these dates are general guidelines and will vary among colleges. Please confirm with each college admissions office for their specific deadlines and stay in constant communication with your high school counselor about how to best prepare for college.

Entrance exams

Curriculum and grading policies vary from school to school, so most colleges rely on standardized testing to evaluate student applicants. Exams like the SAT and the ACT are used in both the admittance and financial aid process.

Preliminary SAT (PSAT) or National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQT) is a standardized test that simulates the actual SAT Reasoning Test. This is a great way to measure how you will perform on the actual SAT in critical reading, math problem-solving and writing.

The SAT Reasoning Test and Subject Tests (SAT II) are the most widely accepted standardized tests among colleges. While the SAT Reasoning Test measures critical reading, math problem-solving and writing, the Subject Tests (SAT II) focus on more specific subjects like English, History, Mathematics, Science and Language. Some colleges use the Subject Tests for admissions, course placement and advice to students on course selection.

Register online for the SAT Exam: www.sat.org

The American College Testing Program (ACT Assessments) is a curriculum-based test. Instead of an aptitude or IQ test, this exam is directly related to what students have learned in their high school courses in English, Mathematics and Science. To prepare for the ACT you can take the PLAN Test, which is administered in the fall of the sophomore year.

Register online for the ACT: www.actstudent.org/index.html

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average annual income of a person possessing a Bachelor's Degree is approximately \$51,206; almost double the \$27,915 annual earnings of a person with only a high school diploma.

